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Maricopa

CHAPTER XI

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

BIRTH

171 846 Birth was preceded and followed by restrictions on the activities of the parents that applied to both to about the same degree. This semi-couvade, as Kroeber styles it, was moderate and of the order that prevailed generally throughout the Southwest and California.

849 When in the fourth or fifth month of pregnancy, the expectant mother should not lie flat on her back else the embryo would lie crosswise or be born feet first. Neither she nor her husband should look at dead animals or birds, else the child would sicken like the animal, would be paralyzed for weeks. On the whole, it were better that the father did not hunt; if he did, he must not stare at what he killed. Nowadays, neither may look at a picture of any sort; the child will be deformed. Nor could either look at or touch rattlesnakes, else the child would be deformed and never walk: it would seem to lack bones; could not stand.

Food tabus applied to the mother from the sixth month. She must eat no more than she could help and must especially avoid fat. Should she eat fat, the embryo would be covered with it, especially its eyes, nose and mouth (a caul?). The mouth would be filled with fat, so that at its first breath, the child would choke. There was no objection to her eating salt, the common tabu elsewhere. Her husband could eat fat and salt at this time, but he joined her after the birth in eschewing them.

It was known that pregnancy has a duration of nine lunar months. It was, however, not usual to calculate the exact time at which the birth would occur, but some women knew they would give birth at a particular full moon, e.g. Births were rather uniformly distributed through the year.

844 343 Birth took place in the menstrual shelter, or a similar structure

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844 The navel cord was cut after the afterbirth was ejected. Anyone cut it and the stub of the navel was never tied. A delayed afterbirth was considered dangerous not only for the mother but the child. The afterbirth was buried a short distance from the house in a hole waist-deep, filled with stones and rammed earth. [732] Should a dog eat it, the child would become insane.

The newborn child was washed with warm water and tied in the cradle which was prepared before it was born. At this time, a woman who had no relatives to help her look after a crying child, would put her finger in her mouth and press it against the baby's palate, so that it would never cry later. They did not massage or mould the child's features or limbs as elsewhere. [856] Slight occipital flattening, due to lying on the hard cradle, was common and was desired. Warm ashes were put on a cloth placed on the navel and soaked with warm water. They might also place on the navel a salve made of a few crushed castor [439] beans (obtained by trade from northern Mexico) mixed with water. The cord dropped off in two days if well tended, but always within four days. No further attention was given the sloughed-off cord.

Immediately after the delivery of the afterbirth, the mother lay in a pit, extending from armpit to knees, within the house. This was previously lined with warmed flat stones and ashes, with which she was also covered. These were renewed as they cooled.

846 It was held that the mother should not resume her occupations for eight days. During this period she was washed every morning and given only corn soup without salt. Her husband also washed on these eight days, but refrained from fats, sweets and salt for the first four only. On the first four days the faces of child and [302] mother were anointed with a preparation made by boiling mesquite beans, straining and boiling down the juice to a syrup, which was then mixed with red paint. This was said to take the grease off their faces.

853 The child was not put to breast for four days. In the meantime it was given drops of warm water. The baby could endure without food, it was held, because the mother had practically starved herself for several months before the birth.